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ABSTRACT

The Student Teaching Assistant (STA) Program was initiated in 1972 by the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Reading-Study Center to provide highly qualified peer tutors for interested campuses within the University's system. STA training workshops are held each summer for approximately twenty academically-able students from participating campuses. These students return to their respective campuses, which hire them and provide tutoring space, the necessary materials, and an advisor. Workshop training in study techniques incorporates the principles of learning and memory with small group instruction and individual practice sessions. Much of the training in establishing a helping relationship is presented through a microcounseling training model. STAs are being utilized in a variety of settings throughout the University of Wisconsin system. (Author/JM)

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HELPING STUDENTS "STA" IN COLLEGE

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Colleges and universities throughout the nation are facing the challenges resulting from virtually open admission policies. While traditional resources have met the needs of most students, an increasing number of minimally-prepared students require additional help in coping with the demands of course work. Having strong student supportive services on campus is rarely enough by itself to alleviate the problem. Educationally disadvantaged students must not only recognize their need for help but be willing to take advantage of its availability. In the belief that students often feel more comfortable in seeking help from their peers, rather than from faculty, the

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Student Teaching Assistant (STA) Program was initiated in 1972 by the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh Reading-Study Center to provide highly qualified peer tutors for interested campuses within the University of Wisconsin System. Research supports the contention that students can play an effective role in helping their peers "learn how to learn."

STA Training Workshops are held each summer on the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh campus. Approximately twenty academically-able students are selected from the participating campuses for the one-week workshop offering intensive training in study skills and beginning interviewing techniques. Each trainee must express an interest and willingness to contribute to a multi-racial learning environment. Instruction is given by staff members of the Reading-Study Center and Counseling Center. Upon completion of their training, the STA's return to their respective campuses which have made a commitment to hire them at a rate of $2.00 - $2.50 an hour, furnish them with a place in which to tutor, provide necessary materials and appoint an advisor to whom they can turn for support.

Workshop training in study techniques incorporates the principles of learning and memory into small-group instruction and individual practice sessions. The SQ4R textbook study approach is stressed heavily as an important basic "learning how to learn" strategy. Other activities include listening and note-taking sessions, tips on scheduling time, effective study conditions, concentration, preparing for and taking exams, strengthening vocabulary and learning to read critically. Role-playing reinforces the learning of these study

techniques and facilitates problem solving.

In response to the need for training in becoming more sensitive to the needs of others, as first expressed by the 1972 workshop participants, the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh Counseling Center has since been effectively involved in the training in this vital area. The preparation for interviewing training consists of an hour-and-a-half session focused on the feelings involved in being a party to a helping relationship. In small groups of seven or eight, trainees share their feelings about being both a helper and a person seeking help. They identify behaviors basic to a good helping relationship, which closely parallel those found by professionals to be necessary.

In succeeding sessions these behaviors are taught through the microcounseling training model (Ivey, 1971), which was adapted for workshop use. The specific behaviors taught include eye contact, posturing, verbal following, open invitation to talk and problem identification. A bad example of each behavior, followed by a good example, is presented on a videotape developed by the trainers for use as a teaching tool. Students in each training group are alerted to what they should look for in each example and thus become sensitized to the specific behaviors being taught.

Each behavior is then practiced in role playing, with one trainee assuming the role of a student seeking academic help and another acting as the STA. The problem situations presented by the help seeker were developed by the trainers.

These brief role-played sessions are videotaped and replayed to the training group for critiquing by the trainers and trainees. This portion of the training often produces some initial anxiety among the STA's, but also receives high praise in later evaluations.

STA's generally evaluate the microcounseling and SQ4R sessions as most helpful, with appreciative comments on the comprehensiveness and practicality of the training. The directors feel that sessions on motivation, goal-setting and problems of multi-cultural students should receive greater emphasis in future workshops.

Workshop expenses include room and board, transportation, textbooks and a $50 stipend for each STA trained, salaries of four Reading-Study Center and two Counseling Center staff members, materials and postage. The workshops have been funded by the University of Wisconsin System.

STA's are being utilized effectively on their respective campuses in a variety of settings, such as reading/study skills and tutorial centers, multicultural centers and academic departments or schools. On the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh campus, several STA's are functioning as peer tutors under the auspices of the Mathematics Department, with strong support of the math faculty. Other STA's serve their peers as tutors in English and study skills at the Reading-Study Center and act as student proctors in a one-credit study skills course offered there.

Reference

Ivey, Allen E. Microcounseling. Springfield, Illinois: Charles E. Thomas, 1971.